

Compression for Coinductive Infinitary Rewriting (A Preliminary Account)

Rémy Cerda¹ and Alexis Saurin^{1,2}

¹ Université Paris Cité, CNRS, IRIF, F-75013 Paris, France

² INRIA π^3 , Paris, France

`Remy.Cerda@math.cnrs.fr`, `Alexis.Saurin@irif.fr`

In “traditional” infinitary rewriting based on ordinal-indexed rewriting sequences and strong Cauchy convergence, a key property of rewriting systems is *compression*, that is, the fact that rewriting sequences of arbitrary ordinal length can be compressed to sequences of length ω . Famous examples of compressible systems are left-linear first-order systems and infinitary λ -calculi.

In this work, we investigate compression in the equivalent setting of coinductive infinitary rewriting, introduced by Endrullis et al. [End+18], which we recall in Section 1 in a slightly augmented form: the original work only covered first-order rewriting, we extend it to rewriting of (possibly non-wellfounded) derivations in an arbitrary system of derivation rules.

Then in Section 2 we define the coinductive counterpart of compressed rewriting sequences, and we present a general coinductive procedure turning arbitrary infinitary rewriting derivations into compressed ones, without relying on a topological formalism. The coinductive presentation of the two aforementioned examples, that is left-linear first-order systems and the full infinitary λ -calculus, are endowed with compression lemmas as instances of our general method.

This is a preliminary work, as our main motivation is to tackle the rewriting induced on non-wellfounded proofs by eliminating cuts. For future work, we will focus on the system μMALL^∞ for multiplicative-additive linear logic with fixed points, the cut-elimination theorem of which crucially relies on a compression lemma [Sau23]. In particular, we hope to be able to use a coinductive compression step as a component of a fully coinductive cut-elimination proof.

1 Coinductive infinitary rewriting

In this first section, we recall the coinductive presentation of infinitary first-order rewriting from [End+18]. Then we provide an extension of this presentation to infinitary λ -calculus, and to a generic notion of rewriting system for non-wellfounded derivations.

1.1 First order infinitary rewriting

Fix a countable set $\mathcal{V}$ of variables. A first-order signature is a countable set Σ equipped with an arity function $\text{ar} : \Sigma \rightarrow \mathbb{N}$; we fix such a signature. The set T_Σ of first-order terms on this signature can be defined inductively by the derivation rules:

$$\frac{x \in \mathcal{V}}{x \in T_\Sigma} \quad \frac{t_1 \in T_\Sigma \quad \dots \quad t_{\text{ar}(c)} \in T_\Sigma}{c(t_1, \dots, t_{\text{ar}(c)}) \in T_\Sigma} \quad (\text{for each } c \in \Sigma).$$

The set T_Σ^∞ of infinitary first-order terms on the signature Σ can then be defined by completing T_Σ with respect to the metric defined by $d(s, t) := 2^{-(\text{the smallest depth at which } s \text{ and } t \text{ differ})}$, or equivalently by treating the above rules coinductively [Bar93] (which we will denote by using double inference bars).

In this setting, an (infinitary) rewrite rule is a couple (p, q) where $p \in T_\Sigma$ and $q \in T_\Sigma^\infty$. An infinitary term rewriting system (ITRS) is a countable set of rewrite rules; we fix an ITRS $\mathcal{R}$. Two terms $s, t \in T_\Sigma^\infty$ are related by a rewrite step, denoted $s \rightarrow t$, whenever there are a rule $(p, q) \in \mathcal{R}$, a (single-hole) context $u[*]$ and a substitution $\sigma : \mathcal{V} \rightarrow T_\Sigma^\infty$ such that $s = u[\sigma \cdot p]$ and $t = u[\sigma \cdot q]$ (where $\sigma \cdot p$ denotes the substitution of each $x \in \mathcal{V}$ by $\sigma(x)$ in p).

A rewriting sequence of ordinal length γ is given by terms $(s_\delta)_{\delta \leq \gamma}$ together with rewrite steps $(s_\delta \rightarrow s_{\delta+1})_{\delta < \gamma}$. Such a rewriting sequence is said to be strongly convergent if for all limit ordinal $\delta \leq \gamma$, $\lim_{\epsilon \rightarrow \delta} d(s_\epsilon, s_{\epsilon+1}) = 0$ and in addition, for all limit ordinal $\delta < \gamma$, the steps $s_\epsilon \rightarrow s_{\epsilon+1}$ occur at depths tending to infinity when $\epsilon \rightarrow \delta$ [Ken+95].

Definition 1. We say that $s \rightarrow^\infty t$ when there is an ordinal γ such that $s \xrightarrow{\gamma}^\infty t$ is derivable in the following system of rules (wheres simple bars denote inductive inferences and double bars denote coinductive inferences, *i.e.* non-wellfounded derivations are allowed provided each infinite branch crosses infinitely often a double bar):

$$\frac{s \xrightarrow{\gamma, n} s' \quad s' \xrightarrow{\gamma}^\infty t}{s \xrightarrow{\gamma}^\infty t} \text{ (split)} \quad \frac{x \in \mathcal{V}}{x \xrightarrow{\gamma}^\infty x} \text{ (var)} \quad \frac{\forall 1 \leq i \leq n, s_i \xrightarrow{\gamma}^\infty t_i}{c(s_1, \dots, s_n) \xrightarrow{\gamma}^\infty c(t_1, \dots, t_n)} \text{ (lift}_c\text{)}$$

where $s \xrightarrow{\gamma, n} s'$ denotes any sequence $s \rightarrow^* s'_1 \xrightarrow{\delta_1}^\infty t_1 \rightarrow^* s'_2 \xrightarrow{\delta_2}^\infty \dots \xrightarrow{\delta_n}^\infty t_n \rightarrow^* s'$ such that $\forall 1 \leq i \leq n, \delta_i < \gamma$. (Notice that we are in fact defining *two* relations, namely $\xrightarrow{\gamma}^\infty$ and $\xrightarrow{\gamma}$, the latter one indicating that the former one occurs under a constructor.)

This coinductive presentation was introduced (with slightly different notations) by Endrullis et al. [End+18], who prove that it is equivalent to the “traditional”, topology-based one. Indeed:

Theorem 2 ([End+18]). For $s, t \in T_\Sigma^\infty$, there is a strongly converging rewriting sequence from s to t iff. $s \rightarrow^\infty t$.

1.2 Infinitary λ -calculus

An identical path can be followed to present an infinitary λ -calculus. (Finite) λ -terms are the elements of the set Λ defined by:

$$\frac{x \in \mathcal{V}}{x \in \Lambda} \quad \frac{x \in \mathcal{V} \quad M \in \Lambda}{\lambda x. M \in \Lambda} \quad \frac{M \in \Lambda \quad N \in \Lambda}{MN \in \Lambda}$$

and the set Λ^∞ of infinitary λ -terms can be defined either by metric completion [Ken+97] or by treating these rules coinductively [EP13]. In both cases we work modulo α -equivalence (which raises some subtleties, see [Kur+13] for a formal treatment.)

As usual, the reduction $\rightarrow$ of β -reduction is defined on Λ^∞ by $(\lambda x. M)N \rightarrow M[N/x]$ for all $M, N \in \Lambda^\infty$ (where $M[N/x]$ denotes the term obtained by substituting N to each free x in M), as well as lifting to contexts. As above, we define:

Definition 3. For $M, N \in \Lambda^\infty$, we say that $M \rightarrow^\infty N$ when there is an ordinal γ such that $M \xrightarrow{\gamma}^\infty N$ is derivable with the rules (split), (var),

$$\frac{M \xrightarrow{\gamma}^\infty M'}{\lambda x. M \xrightarrow{\gamma}^\infty \lambda x. M'} \text{ (lift}_\lambda\text{)} \quad \text{and} \quad \frac{M \xrightarrow{\gamma}^\infty M' \quad N \xrightarrow{\gamma}^\infty N'}{MN \xrightarrow{\gamma}^\infty M'N'} \text{ (lift}_\otimes\text{)}.$$

Theorem 4. For $M, N \in \Lambda^\infty$, there is a strongly converging β -reduction sequence from M to N iff. $M \rightarrow^\infty N$.

This can in fact be extended to all *abc*-infinitary λ -calculi from [Ken+97]. The corresponding work (but the missing piece we intend to add) is presented in [Cer24; Cer25].

1.3 Rewriting non-wellfounded derivations

Consider the set $\mathcal{D}$ of all derivations obtained from a set of rules of one of the following shapes:

$$\frac{p_1 \quad \dots \quad p_k}{c} (r) \quad \text{or} \quad \frac{p_1 \quad \dots \quad p_k}{c} (r)$$

and some rewriting relation $\rightarrow$ on $\mathcal{D}$. Just as we did in Definitions 1 and 3, we can define a relation $\xrightarrow{\gamma}^\infty$ on $\mathcal{D}$ by the rules (split) as well as:

$$\frac{}{d \xrightarrow{\gamma}^\infty d} (\text{refl}) \quad \text{and} \quad \frac{d_1 \xrightarrow{\gamma}^\infty d'_1 \quad \dots \quad d_k \xrightarrow{\gamma}^\infty d'_k}{d \xrightarrow{\gamma}^\infty d'} (\text{lift}_r)$$

where d (resp. d') is a derivation concluded by a rule (r) as above, $d_1, \dots, d_k$ (resp. $d'_1, \dots, d'_k$) are the sub-derivations rooted at the premises of this rule, and (lift_r) is coinductive whenever (r) is. We say that $d \xrightarrow{\gamma}^\infty d'$ whenever there is γ such that $d \xrightarrow{\gamma}^\infty d'$.

Our presentations of first-order rewriting and β -reduction are instances of this construction. Furthermore, as we did in Theorems 2 and 4, one can show that $d \xrightarrow{\gamma}^\infty d'$ iff. there is a strongly convergent rewriting sequence from d to d' .

What remains to be investigated is whether this construction is compatible with validity criteria, that is, global criteria used on top of non-wellfounded derivation systems to sort out “incorrect” derivations, typically to avoid inconsistencies in non-wellfounded proof systems. Our hope is that reasonable validity criteria on the rewritten derivations can be transported to restrict the derivations defining $\xrightarrow{\gamma}^\infty$ in such a way that $\xrightarrow{\gamma}^\infty$ rewrites valid derivations into valid derivations.

2 Compression lemmas

Two standard instances of the Compression lemma, which we would like to transport to the coinductive setting we just presented, are the following:

Theorem 5 ([Ken+95]). Let $\mathcal{R}$ be a left-linear ITRS, that is, no variable occurs twice in the left component of a rule of $\mathcal{R}$. Then for all $s, t \in \mathbf{T}_\Sigma^\infty$, there is a strongly convergent rewriting sequence from s to t iff. there is such a sequence of length at most ω .

Theorem 6 ([Ken+97]). For all $M, N \in \Lambda^\infty$, there is a strongly convergent β -reduction sequence from M to N iff. there is such a sequence of length at most ω .

2.1 Compressed rewriting sequences, coinductively

Since the “length” of a derivation $d \xrightarrow{\gamma}^\infty d'$ is not defined, we first need to introduce a coinductive counterpart of strongly converging rewriting sequences of length ω , extending again a definition from [End+18].

Definition 7. With the notation of Section 1.3, a relation $\xrightarrow{\omega}$ is defined on $\mathcal{D}$ by:

$$\frac{d \xrightarrow{*} e \quad e \xrightarrow{\omega} d'}{d \xrightarrow{\omega} d'} (\text{split}^\omega) \quad \frac{}{d \xrightarrow{\omega} d} (\text{refl}^\omega) \quad \frac{d_1 \xrightarrow{\omega} d'_1 \quad \dots \quad d_k \xrightarrow{\omega} d'_k}{d \xrightarrow{\omega} d'} (\text{lift}_r^\omega)$$

Lemma 8. For $d, d' \in \mathcal{D}$, there is a strongly convergent rewriting sequence of length at most ω from d to d' iff. $d \rightarrow^\omega d'$.

In particular, this construction defines relations $\rightarrow^\omega$ on T_Σ^∞ and Λ^∞ , capturing exactly strongly convergent sequences of rewriting steps through $\mathcal{R}$ and β -reductions, respectively.

A relation $\rightarrow^\infty$ defined as in Section 1.3 has the (coinductive) compression property if any derivation of $d \rightarrow^\infty d'$ can be turned into a derivation of $d \rightarrow^\omega d'$, that is, if $\rightarrow^\infty = \rightarrow^\omega$. In particular for the relation $\rightarrow^\infty$ on T_Σ^∞ , the compression property can be obtained by translating $s \rightarrow^\infty s'$ as a strongly convergent rewriting sequence (Theorem 2), compressing it (Theorem 5), and translating the compressed sequence again (Lemma 8). Similarly, the compression property in Λ^∞ is a consequence of Theorems 4 and 6 and Lemma 8. However, we would like to build a direct, explicit proof, without resorting to ordinal-based infinitary rewriting.

2.2 A general proof structure

With the general notations from Section 1.3, consider the following properties:

- $\mathfrak{P}_{\gamma,n}$: For all $d, d' \in \mathcal{D}$, if $d \rightsquigarrow_{\gamma,n} d'$ then there are $d'' \in \mathcal{D}$ and an ordinal $\delta < \gamma$ such that $d \rightarrow^* d'' \xrightarrow[\delta]{\infty} d'$.
- Ω : For any ordinal δ , if $\forall m \in \mathbb{N}$, $\mathfrak{P}_{\delta,m}$ holds, then for any reduction $d'_n \xrightarrow[\delta]{\infty} e'_n \rightarrow d'$ there is a $d''_n \in \mathcal{D}$ such that $d'_n \rightarrow^* d''_n \xrightarrow[\delta]{\infty} d'$.

Theorem 9. If Ω holds then $\rightarrow^\infty$ has the compression property.

Lemma 10. If $d \xrightarrow[\gamma]{\infty} e$, then for any ordinal $\epsilon \geq \gamma$ there is also a derivation of $d \xrightarrow[\epsilon]{\infty} e$.

Lemma 11. If $d \xrightarrow[\gamma]{\infty} e$ and $e \xrightarrow[\delta]{\infty} f$, then $d \xrightarrow[\epsilon]{\infty} f$ for $\epsilon := \max(\gamma + 1, \delta)$.

Lemma 12. If Ω holds then $\forall \gamma, \forall n \in \mathbb{N}$, $\mathfrak{P}_{\gamma,n}$.

Proof. We proceed by well-founded induction over γ , and we suppose that $\forall \delta < \gamma, \forall m \in \mathbb{N}$, $\mathfrak{P}_{\delta,m}$. Then we proceed by induction on $n \in \mathbb{N}$.

If $n = 0$ the result is immediate since $d \rightsquigarrow_{\gamma,0} d'$ means that $d \rightarrow^* d'$. Otherwise, suppose that $d \rightsquigarrow_{\gamma,n} d'$. This can be decomposed as: $d \rightsquigarrow_{\gamma,n-1}^{0} d'_n \xrightarrow[\delta_n]{\infty} e'_n \rightarrow^* d'$, with $\delta_n < \gamma$. Using Ω and the induction hypothesis (i.e. the fact that $\forall m \in \mathbb{N}$, $\mathfrak{P}_{\delta_n,m}$ holds), there is a $d''_n \in \mathcal{D}$ such that $d \rightsquigarrow_{\gamma,n-1} d'_n \rightarrow^* d''_n \xrightarrow[\delta_n]{\infty} d'$. Notice that $d \rightsquigarrow_{\gamma,n-1} d'_n \rightarrow^* d''_n$ can be reformulated as $d \rightsquigarrow_{\gamma,n-1}^{0} d''_n$, whence we can apply the induction hypothesis on $n - 1$ and obtain a term d'' and an ordinal $\delta' < \gamma$ such that $d \rightarrow^* d'' \xrightarrow[\delta']{\infty} d''_n \xrightarrow[\delta_n]{\infty} d'$, which can be simplified as $d \rightarrow^* d'' \xrightarrow[\delta]{\infty} d'$ with $\delta := \max(\delta', \delta_n) < \gamma$ thanks to Lemma 10. $\square$

Proof of Theorem 9. Suppose Ω . We start with a derivation of $d \xrightarrow[\gamma]{\infty} e$. It can only be obtained through the rule (split), hence $d \rightsquigarrow_{\gamma,n} d' \xrightarrow[\gamma]{\infty} e$. Then:

1. We apply Lemma 12 to $d \rightsquigarrow_{\gamma,n} d'$, and obtain $d \rightarrow^* d'' \xrightarrow[\delta]{\infty} d' \xrightarrow[\gamma]{\infty} e$ for some $d'' \in \mathcal{D}$ and some ordinal $\delta < \gamma$.
2. We apply the transitivity Lemma 11, and obtain $d \rightarrow^* d'' \xrightarrow[\gamma]{\infty} e$.
3. We proceed coinductively in $d'' \xrightarrow[\gamma]{\infty} e$, building $d \rightarrow^* d'' \rightarrow^\omega e$. We conclude with the rule (split $^\omega$). $\square$

Our proof departs from the one presented in the Coq formalisation of [End+18] in three directions: first, as already stressed, it is parametric in the kind of rewriting we consider (whereas their proof only covers first-order rewriting); second, our definition of $\rightarrow^\infty$ features ordinal annotations to constrain the use of coinduction, whereas their definition relies on mixing least and a greatest fixed points, which results in different treatments of the inductive part of the proof; third, our proof provides an explicit coinductive procedure for compressing derivations of infinitary rewritings. This suggests that compression may be computable, in a sense and under conditions that are yet to be made precise (which we leave for further work).

2.3 Back to our main examples

In the property Ω , we isolated the precise step where the specific properties of the considered rewriting system come into play. Let us come back to the two previously described examples, that is left-linear ITRS and infinitary λ -calculus, and instantiate Theorem 9.

Lemma 13. If $\mathcal{R}$ is a left-linear ITRS, then the relation $\rightarrow$ it defines on T_Σ^∞ satisfies the property Ω .

Proof sketch. Let δ be an ordinal such that $\forall m \in \mathbf{N}$, $\mathfrak{P}_{\delta,m}$ holds, and consider a derivation of $s'_n \xrightarrow[\delta]{\tau} t'_n \rightarrow s'$. The last step can be described as $p[\sigma] \rightarrow q[\sigma]$ for a substitution σ . The key observation is that since p is finite, we can analyse $s'_n \xrightarrow[\delta]{\tau} t'_n$ inductively (using the hypothesis on δ when we meet $\rightsquigarrow_{\delta,m}$) and produce, on one hand a finite reduction $s'_n \rightarrow^* p[\tau]$ for some substitution τ , on the other hand derivations $\tau(x) \xrightarrow[\delta]{\sigma} \sigma(x)$ for each $x \in \mathcal{V}$. This allows to conclude: $s'_n \rightarrow^* p[\tau] \rightarrow q[\tau] \xrightarrow[\delta]{\sigma} q[\sigma]$. The left-linearity assumption is used when we define τ : if a variable x appeared several times in p , then we might define $\tau(x)$ in several conflicting ways. $\square$

Corollary 14. If $\mathcal{R}$ is a left-linear ITRS, then the relation $\rightarrow^\infty$ it defines on T_Σ^∞ has the compression property.

The same holds in the infinitary λ -calculus:

Lemma 15. The relation $\rightarrow$ defined on Λ^∞ satisfies the property Ω .

Proof sketch. Let δ be an ordinal such that $\forall m \in \mathbf{N}$, $\mathfrak{P}_{\delta,m}$ holds, and consider a derivation of $M'_n \xrightarrow[\delta]{\tau} N'_n \rightarrow M'$. If the last β -reduction step occurs at top-level, i.e. $N'_n = (\lambda x.P')Q'$ and $M' \stackrel{\delta}{=} P'[Q'/x]$, then by analysing $M'_n \xrightarrow[\delta]{\tau} N'_n$ and using the hypothesis $\mathfrak{P}_{\delta,m}$ we are able to identify terms P, Q such that $M'_n \rightarrow^* (\lambda x.P)Q \rightarrow P[Q/x]$, as well as $P \xrightarrow[\delta]{\tau} P'$ and $Q \xrightarrow[\delta]{\tau} Q'$. For the last two hypotheses we are able to deduce that $P[Q/X] \xrightarrow[\delta]{\tau} P'[Q'/x] = N'_n$. In general the last redex occurs in context, i.e. $N'_n = C[(\lambda x.P')Q']$, and we have to scan this context inductively, collecting finite reductions $P_0 \rightarrow^* P_1 \rightarrow^* \dots \rightarrow^* P_K$ as in Lemma 13. $\square$

Corollary 16. The relation $\rightarrow$ defined on Λ^∞ has the compression property.

In particular, notice that this justifies the coinductive definition of infinitary β -reduction as it is usually written, that is, using $\rightarrow^\omega$ instead of the rather impractical $\rightarrow^\infty$ [EP13; Cza20; Cer24].

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